The Golden Flower: A Taino Myth from Puerto Rico
Mini-Unit Plan

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Designer Information:
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Mini-Unit Introduction:
This unit was created for a class of 20 students in a small college town. The class includes a variety of ELL students and some students with special needs such as language disabilities and developmental delays. The students come from families of diverse economic backgrounds including parents who are professors and doctors and others who live in public housing and have experienced homelessness. The students include members of various ethnic groups including African American, East Indian, Hispanic, Arab, White and mixed ethnicity. Home languages include English, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, and Quechua.

Student goals: Students will:
- Be exposed to techniques of analyzing books using critical thinking
- Have the opportunity to interpret and create symbols
- Develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society (from Teaching Tolerance, Anti-Bias Framework, www.perspective.tolerance.org)
- Affirm and grow their knowledge and pride in their cultural identity (Anti-Bias Framework)
- Grow their curiosity, enjoyment and empathetic awareness of cultural differences and similarities (Anti-Bias Framework)
- Be provided with a cultural story from their own heritage (for Hispanic students)
- Be provided with a positive cultural reference about Latino heritage
Teacher Goals:
- To increase my ability to use VTS techniques when looking at books.
- To share a cultural story of my own heritage.
- To critically inquire: Are the representation of Tainos in this book accurate?

Unit Introduction References:


Contextualizing the Picture Book:

Summary: This myth explains the origin of the sea, the forest, and the island now called Puerto Rico

Genre: Myth, Folktale

Media: Acrylic & Gouache

Geographic region: Puerto Rico, The Caribbean

Cultural themes: The Golden Flower is a Taino myth that tells the story about the creation of the island of Puerto Rico

Author background: Nina Jaffe is an author, story teller, and teacher. She teaches at Bank St College of Education in New York City where she lives. She has written two other books: The Way Meat Loves Salt: A Cinderella Tale From the Jewish Tradition (1998) and Patakín: World Tales of Drums and Drummers (2001). Ms Jaffe encourages the use of
story telling through her project at Bank St College - Feast: Folklore Education and Storytelling for Teachers.

Sources of inspiration for the author: In the afterword of this book the author explains that she first read this story in Spanish written by Carmen Puigdollers, *Como se Formó la Bella Isla de Borinquén* (n.d.). Later a friend from Puerto Rico, Lillian Ayala, shared with Ms. Jaffe that she remembered being told the same story as a child.

Illustrator background: Enrique O. Sanchez is an author and an illustrator of children's books and an accomplished painter. Some of his other published works include *Big Enough/Bastante Grande* (1998), *Estela's Swap* (2002), and *Cristina Keeps a Promise* (The Way I Act Books, 2006). Mr Sanchez is from the Dominican Republic. He lives with his family in Vermont. Mr. Sanchez is also a drummer and a collector of drums.

Contextual Information References:


Learning Experiences:

Learning Experience 1: Book introduction, Whole Book Approach (WBA) and Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

Students will be introduced to the book *The Golden Flower* by looking carefully at the parts of the book such as the front and back cover, title page and front matter. The afterword will be read and discussed with children later in the unit.

Students will begin by exploring, describing and reading the design elements of the book. For this particular book the emphasis will be on front and back covers, the title page and the front matter. Students will be asked questions and prompted to think about what they see, what they think the book might be about, and encouraged to explain their
thinking. The labels for specific parts of the book will be introduced but will not be the focus of this discussion.

Students will then read the book for the first time. Discussion and noticing of details will be encouraged. The class will stop reading the book and engage in looking closely at one specific page in this book with VTS. I have chosen the picture that goes across two pages which begin with the text:

"One woman said, "If you put your ear next to the ball, you can hear strange noises coming from inside."

One of the reasons for choosing this illustration is because this page shows a female character taking action. Students will then use this picture to engage with the essential questions of VTS.

- What is going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more do you find?
- Can you say more about that?

The purpose of this is to develop flexible thinking and reasoning with evidence, speculating, and cultivating a point of view. This activity also strengthens language and listening skills.

**Learning Experience 1 References:**


*This book provides photographs of primary source Taino artifacts for inspiration.*


*This book provide several Taino myths written in Spanish.*

**Learning Experience 2:** Freeze Frame and problem solving

This lesson will allow children to look at one illustration and elicit solutions to the problem illustrated on the page. Students will focus on the pages that begin with:

"They both ran without stopping until they reached a shining globe at the same time."

In this illustration two characters are tugging back and forth to gain control of a pumpkin. If possible show the illustration on a large screen or with an Elmo projector.
Students will work with a partner to find alternative ways to resolve the problem. Students will be asked probing questions such as:
- Who should get the pumpkin?
- Would it be fair for the person who saw it first to keep it? (The person who is strongest? The person who reached it first? The eldest person?)
- How could this problem be resolved fairly?
- What would the characters say?

Then student volunteers will show the class how they resolved the problem by acting out the page and their solution.

**Learning Experience 3: Taino Petroglyphs: Making Meaning of Symbols**

In this lesson students will look at the representation of Taino people and the petroglyphs that are seen in this book. One of the issues that I wondered about in this picture book was if the representation of the Tainos was accurate. The use of feathers, and body paint was not a feature I had seen in other representations of Tainos. I will discuss with students whether they think this story is real or pretend and why.

I will explain to students the concept of a myth. The definition I will use is from dictionary.com. A traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature.

We will then discuss if students think this story is real or pretend and why. I have some concerns about the accuracy of the representation of Tainos in this book. For instance in the front matter an illustration shows a bowl with corn. Corn is not to my knowledge a common crop or food on the island of Puerto Rico. In addition the Tainos are shown wearing body paint. The use of feathers in the hair also makes me wonder about stereotypical representation of Native people. In the short time available for this project I was unable to research the answer to some of these questions.

I will then explain to students that the Tainos were real people. However we can't be sure of how they dressed or if they used body paint. Why might the illustrator have decided to use some design on the body of the Tainos?
However we do know that the Tainos used petroglyphs. Students will then see images of petroglyphs from a web site. After viewing some of the images students will be prompted to think about what these images were used for, and what they might be trying to symbolize. On what surface did they notice the images had been drawn? Students will then view individual representations of common petroglyphs. Students will be asked to draw some of the figures in the air using their finger as a magic pencil. This will provide some kinesthetic information. Afterwards students will be asked to either reproduce one symbol they have seen or create their own. Students will then label the petroglyphs with a word for the object they think it represents. The drawings of various petroglyphs will be assembled into a class book.

**Learning Experience 3 Reference:**


**Summative Learning Experience:** Charades, Taino Scene, and Garden Stones

The class will begin as a whole. The students will look at the class book of Taino symbols created in the last lesson. Students will then play a game of charades acting out one of the symbols by using gestures.

Students will guess which symbol their peer is acting out.

The culminating experience for this unit will let children choose between two activities.

- Students can choose to create a drawing that using petroglyphs. Students will draw petroglyphs from the class book or other sources. They will use black permanent markers and then add paint using water colors. They can recreate scene using a page from the book or their own imagination.

- Students may instead create garden stones decorate with petroglyph images. Students may choose to draw one image or several.
The Taino art book will be available for inspiration along with play dough or Sculpey clay for students to create three dimensional art work during center time.

**Summary Learning Experience Reference:**


*This book provides photographs of primary source Taino artifacts for inspiration.*

**Possible Further Connections:**

- Creation stories: Create a class book of our own version of a creation story
- Islands: What is an island? What are other islands? Who and what live on islands?
- Flood Myths
- Pumpkins: Harvesting pumpkins, cooking pumpkin bread, roasting and eating seeds
- Autobiography: The Creation of You. Have students & families write 'The Story of __________' using pictures or photographs that tell a straightforward story about their child or a more creative rendition about their child.

**Standards:**

CCSS:

- RL.K.1. With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- RL.K.2. With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.
- RL.K.3. 3. With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.